THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

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If you are astounded by the speed with which this newsletter follows the last one, don't flip. What is happening is that we are trying to get current. Getting current can be a very involved, not to mention difficult process. As we said, we're trying.

Since the mail sometimes takes as long as 3 weeks to be delivered, we have had a few letters only as a result of the October Newsletter. We therefore do not have a great deal of material for you. This newsletter, besides items of general interest, contains the title page and the first page of music from TREEMONISHA. We are reprinting from the March 1948 RECORD CHANGER, our second Brun Campbell article.

Toronto ragophiles and devotees of Club 76 will be sorry to learn of the death of Bob Cooke, on November 17th. Mr. Cooke as owner of Club 76 was responsible for introducing ragtime to Toronto, and thereby also indirectly responsible for the formation of the Ragtime Society. We extend our sympathies to Mrs. Cooke and family.

PERFORMERS.

We have no news of changes of location of the various piano players. As fas as we can ascertain they remain as per our last newsletter.

RENEWALS.

As those of you who have been with us for the past two years are aware, our subscription year follows the calendar year. In short, all subscriptions are up for renewal on January 1st. The exception to this is that those newcomers who join us in late October to the end of the year have their subscription extended to the end of the following year. The system has this as its sole advantage: it saves us a considerable amount of book-keeping. It also enables us to plan for the following year since we know early in the year approximately how much we will have to work with. So if there is a red 'X' in the square at the right, your subscription ends with the year. We hope all of you will see fit to renew and make it possible for us to continue for another year. We ask a modest $2.00. For the information of those overseas subscribers who must remit via the bank, our bank is the Royal Bank of Canada, Avenue Rd., and Davenport Branch, Toronto, Ontario. Many of you send cash in the mail which is quite acceptable to this Society, but, we understand, frowned upon by post office authorities. We cannot ask you to break the law, but to our knowledge no cash has as yet gone astray, and it is so convenient too.

Buddy's and Jimmy's Inn

by Tom Shea

It's a time machine. Open the door - it's 1930 inside. There's vaudeville Ever see a soft shoe dance ? Listen to Sunbonnet Sue or Goodby Boys in close harmony ? There's ragtime - the Maple Leaf Rag, or the piano man's own Coffee Pot Rag. The mural on the wall says "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" while across the room on another wall, two lovers in silhouette sit under a full moon. The hands of the big oak clock over the bar have been stopped at 5 o'clock since who knows when. You wonder if Buddy's and Jimmy's wouldn't vanish in a cloud of memories and used-to-be's if the clock were started again. Time rushes by outside on Cass Avenue but stops at the door of Buddy's and Jimmy's.

Miss Buddy Adams and Mr. Jimmy Bell opened up at 3660 Cass Avenue in Detroit in 1933. They were both troupers and for years managed their own band and did their song and dance routines in clubs and theatres all over the midwest. In the early years they worked with headliners like Ted Lewis, Blossom Seeley, and Benny Fields.

When the depression hit, the bottom dropped out of show business, and if you wanted to eat regularly, you got out, or got yourself a second line of work. They chose the latter, rented a building and opened Buddy's and Jimmy's Inn. The whole family pitched in to make the place go. Buddy's husband John made the sign out front, painted the murals on the walls, made the oriental lighting fixtures, and the mahogany bar. Buddy and Jimmy waited tables and entertained the customers with their vaudeville routines - routines they were still using until Jimmy's death last year.

About 10 years ago Fran Welch joined the company to add even more variety to the entertainment. Fran has done considerable club, theatre and radio work and belts out the old songs in a completely satisfying manner.

Dewey Lee is the piano man. He has been playing about forty years and has never had a lesson. He started in show business in 1907 when he, his mother and his brother and sister joined Wixham Bros. Carnival as singers and dancers. About 1912 he joined the Georgia Minstrels and a few years later helped open the Vaudette Theatre which was the first negro stage theatre in Detroit.

Today Dewey can be heard pounding out rags, blues, and the old vaudeville numbers in an authentic style and attack. He gets many requests for an original composition called Coffee Pot Rag. As nearly as Dewey can remember, he put this one together about 1930. Another favorite is Detroit Rag written by a friend, Willie Lewis, who used to play piano at the Turf Café at Hastings and Mullett Streets in Detroit. Both compositions are outside the framework of classic ragtime, but are rollicking numbers in the true spirit of good time piano and are a pleasure to hear.

The last time I was in Buddy's and Jimmy's, I met Mel Moran, who, until his retirement had been in the music business as a banjo and guitar player, singer, song plugger and composer. Mel has lots of stories about the old days. He'll tell you how he used to plug songs by leaning out the windows of publishers' offices and singing through a megaphone to the people on the streets below; or about working with the shadowy Froggie Moore. According to Mel, Froggie was a first class piano player, but so temperamental that many performers refused to work with him.

Be sure and drop in if you're ever in Detroit. There's lots more, all out of the ordinary to be seen and heard at Buddy's and Jimmy's.

L.P. RECORDS.

Fingerbuster, by Ron Weatherburn. After much discussion and thought, the Society decided very reluctantly to postpone production of this L.P. Those few people who did send in their money for this record have had it returned to them by our treasurer

Classic & Modern Rags, by Tom Shea. Response, and comment has been most favorable on this, the Society's first L.P. If the present rate of sale continues, it looks like our first printing will be out of stock by the end of this year. Orders received before December 7th will be shipped immediately on receipt, and will be terminated on Dec. 11th. In this way we feel we can guarantee Xmas delivery for those ordering it as Xmas presents, and if your husband or wife is a ragtime nut, what better gift. Orders received after this date will be held for shipment until after Xmas.

BOB DARCH RAGTIME PIANO. Those newcomers who have written to us asking where they might obtain this L.P., and those who have received our green stock list with this L.P. crossed out can once again order it through the Society for a limited time. Earlier this year the Society was informed by the local distributor for this record that they were returning this stock to the factory and would henceforth no longer carry it in stock. Recently we learned that they had retained a small amount. This week the Society purchased their balance, and can now offer for immedaite delivery 13 only copies of this excellent ragtime record. Your society has stated before that this record is not only the finest that Bob Darch has cut, it is one of the best traditional ragtime numbers made in recent years. No attempt was made to water down the excellent tunes so as to appeal to the public at large, and consequently it never did achieve phenomenal sales for the simple reason that ragtime is beyond the scope of the masses. Postpaid $4.00

SHEET MUSIC.

The Society since its inception 2 years ago has probably sold more copies of Maple Leaf Rag than any other, buying and reslling the commercially available editions. The second largest seller has been Original Rags which was our first reprint, and not available commercially. We are still buying Maple Leaf commercially, and have now run out of our first reprint of Original.

Available in December will be Maple Leaf Rag photographed from the original and including its original front cover as shown on page 50 of They All Played Ragtime. This will be up to our usual high quality of printing, and will sell for the usual $1.00.

Also available in December will be our second edition of 'Original Rags', also with its original front cover as shown on the 8th page of photographs following page 138 of They All Played Ragtime. This printing will be of a much superior quality than our first printing of Original Rags and will be our first offering of 4 pages of music plus cover. This too will be at $1.00.

The Society feels that these two numbers which set the pace for the next 12 years or so in ragtime, should be in everyone's collection. Maple Leaf Rag still in print after 64 years needs no further discussion. Original Rags with its five beautiful haunting themes was truly one of Joplin's finest numbers.

All orders received will be mailed immediately after Xmas.

ragtime begins

early days with scott joplin recalled by s. brunson campbell

Where did Ragtime, the basis for our present day jazz music, spring from?

I don't think anyone can answer that question truthfully. But as far back as Stephen Foster's and George Bland's time, their melodies had ragtime strains in them, as did the Fred Metz composition "There'll Be A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight," written in 1885.

Then in 1892 Tony Jackson, a New Orleans Negro pianist, composed a tune called "Michigan Water" that was somewhat "raggy," and in 1893, we find the first time the word Ragtime ever appeared on the cover of sheet music. It was on the cover of a song composed by a Negro musician of Detroit, Michigan, by the name of Fred Stone, who named this song "Ma Ragtime Baby."

Nothing much happened along the Ragtime Route until the year 1897, when several more feeble attempts at ragtime composing took place. But in that year a Negro pianist of St. Louis, Missouri, by the name of Tom Turpin, had published by Harry Von Tilzer a tune which he had written in 1896, called "The Harlem Rag." This "rag" was claimed to be the first "rag" ever written. It *was* the first "rag" of a more advanced style in ragtime, and it wasn't long before the Negro district around Chestnut and Market and West 18th Street of St. Louis was rocking to Tom Turpin's "Harlem Rag." But while this rag was a good number it was not in the true ragtime pattern, for it was rearranged three different times, years later, and William H. Tyers (another Negro musician) finally put it in the true ragtime style. But in 1897 a pianist and composer by the name of Scott Joplin, over at Sedalia, Missouri, finally gave birth to ragtime in its perfected form when he wrote his first rag called "The Original Rags," which was a medley of rags. He wrote it in 1897; and Carl Hoffman, a Kansas City music publisher, published it in 1898. Now if that "rag" was not enough to convince the critics that Scott Joplin was Ragtime's master, then his next rag did, for it was his famous "Maple Leaf Rag" of 1899. It became the classic of all rags.

In the same year he wrote two more rags, "The Sun Flower Slow Drag," and "Swipsy," a cakewalk. He sold these rags to John Stark and Son, music publishers of Sedalia, where the "Maple Leaf Rag" was first published in 1899 by them. Joplin then signed a five year contract with John Stark to write rags for them.

There were many attempts to deprive the Negroes of their contributions to this early American music, but all the attempts failed.

Sedalia, Missouri, became the "hub" in the Ragtime wheel, and there was a reason for this, for at Sedalia in the 90's there was a Negro Musical School, one of the finest in America at the time. It was the George R. Smith Negro Musical College, built as a memorial by Sarah Smith, daughter of Colonel Smith, who was the founder of Sedalia. It was a wide open town in those days, with saloons, gambling houses, dance halls, and districts where the red light glowed. In these places the Negro pianists could be found selling their wares. The Negro district was a musical city in itself, for the College furnished the opportunity to the Negroes who wanted to progress in the field of music. And many of them took advantage of this great opportunity. There were many fine Negro musicians in Sedalia in those days, and Scott Joplin was the greatest. He wanted to go places in music and he did, for he was very studious. He learned the technique of writing music at the Smith School, and took courses in harmony, and other courses that were a great help to him later. He was a fine pianist and also played the cornet and was somewhat of a singer.

There were other Negro pianists there who helped Joplin make ragtime history. They were Scott Hayden, Otis Saunders, Arthur Marshall, Melford Alexander, Tony Williams, Jim Hastings and Ida Hastings. There were several fine clubs in Sedalia in the 90's. Two of the most popular were the "Maple Leaf Club" named after Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" and located at 119 East Main Street, and the "400 Social Club" at 108 East Main Street.

So it was in this musical atmosphere that ragtime was born in 1898, and it was in this same musical atmosphere that Scott Joplin taught me to play his first rags in 1899 when I was fifteen years old. I was the first white pianist to play his famous "Maple Leaf Rag" and his other early rags. I became the original "Ragtime Kid," and toured the mid-west pioneering the playing of Scott Joplin's ragtime. I played in honky-tonks, saloons, dance halls, etc. and became one of the best rag men of the original ragtime pianists. But in 1908 I gave up the piano.

Now back in Sedalia, in the 90's, there was a Negro brass band organized in December 1891, of twelve pieces, that called themselves the "Queen City Negro Band." Scott Joplin played first B flat cornet with this band in 1894-95. They were the first band in America to play ragtime.

Out of this band, Joplin took five pieces: E flat tuba, baritone cornet, clarinet and drums and piano (Joplin at the piano). These two outfits were the first bands in America to play "Maple Leaf Rag," "Sun Flower Slow Drag," and Tom Turpin's "Bowery Buck," three of the first rags ever written.

These two outfits were in constant demand to play for parties and dances by the white and colored people of the town and the surrounding country, as ragtime was beginning to take the nation by storm at the turn of the century.

Another musical change was taking place in America then. It was in the year 1900, after Scott Joplin's first rags made their appearance in New Orleans, where Storyville began jumping to the rhythm of Joplin's "Original Rags," "Maple Leaf Rag" and "Sun Flower Slow Drag." The agitated trumpet of Buddy Bolden sounded through the Mississippi Delta and the jazz of America; hot Dixieland jazz, a strange music of Negro origin, was in the making. And maybe Scott Joplin's ragtime may have inspired Buddy Bolden to blow out the jazz call that sent New Orleans Dixieland jazz around the world.

While ragtime and jazz music were created by Negroes, it was the white folks of Sedalia, Kansas City, St. Louis and New Orleans who first made it popular. They first heard it in the Negro districts of those cities and invited the Negro pianists and small bands into their homes to play for their parties and dances.

At first it was considered a vulgar music and only fit to be heard in the redlight districts of the great cities of America. It was the music of the "Devil the Ministers

Preached." But it was not long before it grew up and today after half a century ragtime music's spirit is a respectable music, accepted throughout the world as such.

I am happy that I sat on the sidelines and witnessed Scott Joplin's fine ragtime music evolve into jazz. For he wrote over forty hits and they were the classics of the cavalcade of ragtime. He was the king of all the ragtime writers of the world and fifty years ago his music started the greatest musical craze the world has ever known.

I am the last of that little group of original rag men alive who first pioneered ragtime at Sedalia in the 90's. I am happy in the part that I played in spreading the gospel of that new music and to have lived long enough to see the changes it has brought about in American music.

The building at 119 East Main Street that housed the Maple Leaf Club still stands. It is now a recreational center for Negroes, but it stands as a monument to Scott Joplin and early American music.

PHILOSOPHIZING RAG-TIME

AMERICA ACCEPTS her rag-time, and dances and sings it, but it is questionable if she has ever attempted to philosophize it. Now it has gone abroad and taken hold on other nations, particularly England, we shall no doubt see it probed to its foundation principles and fitted into the rational scheme of life. The London *Times* thinks it not beneath its dignity to devote a two-column article toward some solution of its qualities, and it finds rag-time "absolutely characteristic of its inventors." From nowhere but the United States could such music have sprung, declares The Thunderer. "It is the music of the hustler, of the feverishly active speculator; of the 'sky-scraper' and the 'grain-elevator.'" *The Times* finds it impossible to doubt its vigor—"vigor which is perhaps empty sometimes and meaningless, but, in the hands of competent interpreters, brimming over with life." For those who have ears to hear—and this of cours means *The Times*—here are "the seeds from which a national art may spring," and it goes on to philosophize:

"Much dross will have to be cleared away in the process, much vulgarity and senselessness will have to give place to a saner, a finer ideal. The stream must be directed in the right channel. The American people are too apt to look on their restless activity as an end rather than a means—so that the results of their efforts are often quite out of proportion to those efforts themselves—but surely, if a great end were once in view, the feverish zeal of the nation would carry out that end with a vigor unsurpassed. Will it be so with American music? We look to the future for the American composer, not, indeed, to the Parkers and MacDowells of the present, who are taking over a foreign art ready-made and are imitating it with more or less success and with a complete absence of vital force, but to some one as yet unknown, perhaps unborn, who will sing the songs of his own nation, his own time, and his own character.

"What, then, is 'rag-time'? Mr. Louis Hirsch (a well-known composer of such music) has recently declared that 'the essence of "rag-time" is the mixture of two rhythms.' Mr. Frank Kidson in 'Grove's Dictionary of Music,' defines 'rag-time' as 'broken rhythm'; and it may be added that in American slang to 'rag' a melody is to syncopate a normally regular tune.

"'Rag-time,' then, may be said to be a strongly syncopated melody superimposed on a strictly regular accompaniment, and it is the combination of these two rhythms that gives 'rag-time' its character."

Syncopations of course present no new musical formulas. They are found in most folk-songs. The question, thinks *The Times*, is "not whether they are new, but whether they are vital." Beethoven in his Leonora Overture and Berlioz in his Hungarian March discovered long ago the driving force which lies behind such syncopations. But the "rag-time" has one peculiarity all its own:

"The words as well as the music are, so to speak, syncopated. Take, for example, the opening lines of 'Waiting for the *Robert E. Lee*' (a truly American title)! This, tho for convenience it is written out as a rhythm of 8, is really a rhythm of 3 followed by a rhythm of 5, breaking without warning occasionally into the normal rhythm of 8. Such rhythmical subtleties can only be paralleled in the motets of the early contrapuntists. Nor is this syncopation a mere academic accomplishment; it connotes a special frame of mind, an eagerness, a desire to be beforehand which is eminently characteristic of the nationality of its performers. With a good 'rag-time' singer the hearer is not conscious of mechanical crossing of rhythms; the total effect is that of a perfectly free declamation which by some miracle coincides exactly with the absolutely strict time of the accompaniment.

"Free rhythm is, of course, no new thing in music—the tyranny of the bar in music dates back no further than the 17th century—but cross rhythm depends for its effect on the contrast between it and the normal accent represented by the bar. Thus in the Schumann Pianoforte Concerto the apparent cross rhythm is (after the first few bars) for the eye only and not for the ear, which does not for long retain the memory of the normal accent. 'Rag-time' depends for its effect not on the free rhythm of the melody, but on the contrast between that free rhythm and the absolutely strict bar accents of the accompaniment.

"There are other characteristics of 'rag-time' music which, tho not peculiar to it, almost always accompany the 'rag-time' element. Such, for example, is the almost invariable meter of the choruses—two short lines followed by two long lines, the short lines having the masculine ending and the long lines the feminine—as in the chorus of 'Oh, you beautiful doll'; or the lengthening of the fourth strain of the chorus, so as to lead unexpectedly to a fifth line, as in 'Going back to Dixie.' These and other points give a peculiar lilt to these melodies which help to make their character."

The words of rag-time songs, we are assured, must not be contemptuously dismissed as meaningless rubbish:

"They may not be anything as literature—indeed, they often can not be said to be either sense or grammar—but for all that they are an interesting study in the fitting of a verbal to a musical pattern. No one in his senses tries to hear the words of a 'rag-time' song with a view to understanding their meaning; but any one can hear enough of them to see how the meters and rime-schemes emphasize and increase the rhythm of the music.

"There are sincere and sensitive musicians who hold that 'rag-time' is decadent and deplore its popularity as an evil sign of the times. They see in it all the worst characteristics of the modern American (many of them, perhaps, caught from the despised negro race). 'Rag-time' in fact leaves, they feel, an unpleasant taste in the mouths of healthy-minded people. Perhaps their objections are partly accounted for by the fact that many of the best and most popular 'rag-time' tunes are associated in their minds with certain repulsive ball-room dances or such abominations as the 'Gaby Glide.' But this connection is purely accidental. There is, surely, nothing unhealthy or lascivious in the music itself—indeed, its very vigor and rhythm must have a stimulating effect on the popular musical mind. The sloppy rhythmless amateur, the inefficient soprano who can not leave her high notes, will be hard put to it to make anything of 'rag-time'—they must set their house in order before it will have anything to say to them. To perform these songs properly, both singer and pianist must have a strong feeling for rhythm and an absolutely accurate sense of time. The American public have learned to appreciate rhythm at the feet of that really remarkable composer Sousa; he it is who has prepared the way for this peculiar specialization in rhythm which seems to fit in so absolutely with the American character."

c. 1919 author unknown

TREEMONISHA.

We have started our research into printing costs of this opera, and although final figures are not yet available, it would seem that there is no technical difficulty in the way. Our investigations to date indicate that the cost will not be in the $15.00 to $25.00 range that we mentionned in our last newsletter. The cost will not be above $15.00, and in all likelihood will be below that figure. The Society is prepared to subsidize the cost of production of this 230 page book which we anticipate will be on standard 8½ x 11 paper, punched for looseleaf, and loosely held together. The offset process will be used which will give a quality identical to our sheet music offerings.
A number of people have indicated interest in this project, but we donot yet have a sufficient number to merit proceeding further with it. Unless more of our subscribers wish it, we will have no alternative but to drop it in favour of other projects. If you want it, we must hear from you. In next month's newsletter we hope to print the title page, and the first page of music for your perusal and comment.

FROM OUR SUBSCRIBERS

We have been hearing lately from Russ Cole who sends us his roundup of 'Songs Father Sang', ...not ragtime, but a list of songs from the earliest days up to the present. Russ sends his best wishes to the Society and adds ...'the best music - to those of my tastes - has been "dive music", (many of the musicians lived but a fraction, indeed, of three score & ten) - plus that of colored players & singers of the South including the pre-Oklahoma Indian Territory who would not and could not be commercialized (no studio clocks and control rooms) - free musicians, unfettered indeed, and uninfluenced by the orders of GM, Kraft Cheese, and self anointed arrangers and judg of SPEBSQSA.'
Correction: We inadvertently placed Jerry Stockton in Dunbar, VA. Jerry informed us in no uncertain terms that Dunbar is in WEST (By God) Virginia, a separate state from VA. Sorry Jerry, it won't happen again.

VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS.
By this cryptic heading we refer to those few modern day pioneers who, as St. Paul did, go forth to spread the word. After several years, the number of professional piano players is still not large. We continue to hear from people who have been told about the Society by Bob Darch, or whose enthusiasm for ragtime has beem fired by Darch. We hear from young college age people who are infected by that pianist par excellence, Max Morath, on his tours of universities, student unions, etc. We haven't met Wally Rose, although we have known of him for years through his recordings with Good Time Jazz, and we would say that Wally is one of the earliest of the Ragtime Revivalists. On the average of every ten days, a letter will arrive which begins," Wally Rose gave me your address....." We hear from many people in England, and now from Australia and New Zealand via that travelling man, Ron Weatherburn, pianist with the Kenny Ball Band. From these people we learn that Ron is playing in his solo repertoires, quite a few rags which he has learned from music supplied by the Ragtime Society.

We apologize for the disjointed nature of this newsletter, and hope you will look on it as an interim newsletter. We hope (R) hope to mail December's letter within 2 weeks, and are currently working on it. See you then.

The heartfelt sympathy of the Society officers is extended to all our American friends through the tragic and untimely loss of President John F. Kennedy.